

GUIDANCE FOR FEDERAL EMPLOYEES REGARDING THE NOVEL INFLUENZA A (H1N1)

Outbreaks of a novel strain of the H1N1 influenza (previously known as Swine Flu) have been detected in humans in multiple states in the United States as well as Mexico and other countries. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) along with the World Health Organization (WHO) are diligently investigating reported outbreaks in the United States and internationally. In addition, CDC has prepared guidance and recommendations on steps that federal employees can take to protect their health and the health of their friends and families.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

What is the novel Influenza A (H1N1)?

The novel Influenza A (H1N1) is a respiratory disease caused by type A influenza viruses that cause regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get H1N1, but human infections can and do happen. H1N1 viruses have been reported to spread from person to person, but in the past, this transmission was limited and not sustained beyond three people.

What are the symptoms?

Employees should be on alert for the symptoms of influenza. Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with the novel influenza A (H1N1). If you exhibit symptoms, you should request leave from your supervisor, stay home, and limit contact with other people to prevent the spread of infection. Seek appropriate medical attention, and follow any instructions from your primary care provider.

Is this novel influenza A (H1N1) virus contagious? And how does it spread?

CDC has determined that this novel influenza A (H1N1) virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human. Spread of this new H1N1 flu virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people may become infected by touching contaminated objects or surfaces with flu viruses on them and then touching their eyes, nose, or mouth.

II. PREVENTION MEASURES

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against the novel influenza A (H1N1). There are everyday actions, however, that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like H1N1 influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health and avoid spreading the flu:

Practice good hygiene.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective if soap and water are not readily available. However, they must be >60% alcohol. Rub your hands with sanitizer vigorously until it is dried.
- Washing hands vigorously for 15-20 seconds is essential, especially after the following activities:
 - Before preparing or eating food
 - After going to the bathroom or assisting someone with personal needs
 - Before and after tending to someone who is sick
 - After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
 - After handling an animal or animal waste
 - After handling garbage
 - Before and after treating a cut or wound

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with infected people or people who exhibit signs of illness.
- If you or a family member gets sick with influenza, CDC recommends staying home from work or school and limiting contact with others to keep from infecting them.

Try not to touch potentially contaminated surfaces.

- Influenza viruses can persist on both nonporous and porous environmental surfaces for hours to days depending on a variety of human and environmental factors. The secondary spread of infectious virus from environmental reservoirs to susceptible persons is accomplished primarily via hand transfer (i.e., hand contact with contaminated surfaces and then touching mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, and mouth).
- Proper hand washing or hand hygiene, coupled with respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette is the principal means of interrupting this transfer. Routine cleaning and disinfection strategies used during influenza seasons could be applied to the environmental management of the current influenza outbreak.

Employees who work in healthcare or laboratory settings may require additional precautions. Specific guidance for clinicians and public health professionals can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/index.htm>

All employees should self-monitor for fever and any symptoms that include cough, sore throat, headache, runny nose, muscle aches, and, in some cases, vomiting and diarrhea. Employees should contact their supervisor and request sick leave if they become ill. Employees should also refrain from traveling while ill.

There are antiviral medications for prevention and treatment of H1N1 that a doctor can prescribe.

Antiviral Prophylaxis and Treatment

- Guidelines for the use of antiviral medication for the treatment and prophylaxis of H1N1 are available on the CDC website. These guidelines are updated as we learn more about this new virus, so be sure to check for the most current guidelines.

Federal Occupational Health Services

- Occupational health professionals are available on a consultative basis to assess agency risk and provide recommendations.
- FOH health unit staff and EAP counselors are available to answer individual employee questions and concerns.
- **PLEASE NOTE: FOH HEALTH CENTERS DO NOT STOCK ANY ANTIVIRAL MEDICATIONS AND ARE NOT EQUIPPED TO DIAGNOSE OR TREAT H1N1 FLU OR SEASONAL INFLUENZA.** Nurses are not licensed to dispense these medications. Employees with signs or symptoms of influenza will be referred to their health care provider for evaluation and treatment.

For more information on FOH services, visit <http://www.foh.dhhs.gov/> or call 1-800-457-9808.

III. HELPFUL Links and Resources:

General Information

CDC: U.S. Human Cases of H1N1 Flu Infection
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/index.htm>

OPM Pandemic Website
<http://www.opm.gov/pandemic/>

HHS Pandemic Website
<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/>

OPM Information for Federal Employees

Federal Benefits During an Emergency

<http://www.opm.gov/pandemic/agency6h-federalbenefits.pdf>

A Federal employee's emergency guide

<http://www.opm.gov/emergency/PDF/EmployeesGuide.pdf>

A Federal Employee's Family Preparedness Guide

<http://www.opm.gov/emergency/PDF/NationalFamilyGuide.pdf>

A Federal Employee's Family Preparedness Guide

(For the Washington, D.C. Area)

<http://www.opm.gov/emergency/PDF/DCAreaFamilyGuide.pdf>

OPM Info for Departments and Agencies

Handbook on Pay and Leave Benefits for Federal Employees Affected by Severe Weather Conditions or Other Emergency Situations

[http://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2008/HandbookForEmergencies\(PayAndLeave\).pdf](http://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2008/HandbookForEmergencies(PayAndLeave).pdf)

Federal Manager's/ Decision Maker's Emergency Guide

<http://www.opm.gov/emergency/PDF/ManagersGuide.pdf>

HUMAN CAPITAL PLANNINGFOR PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

Information for Agencies and Departments

http://www.opm.gov/pandemic/OPM-Pandemic_AllIssuances.pdf

HR Flexibilities Available to Assist Federal Employees Affected by Severe Weather Conditions or Other Emergency Situations

<http://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2008/2008-09.asp>

Advice to Federal Employees and Agencies on Preventing the Spread of the Current Flu and Maintaining Readiness to Use HR Flexibilities if Necessary 4/26/09

<http://www.chcoc.gov/Transmittals/TransmittalDetails.aspx?TransmittalID=2227>